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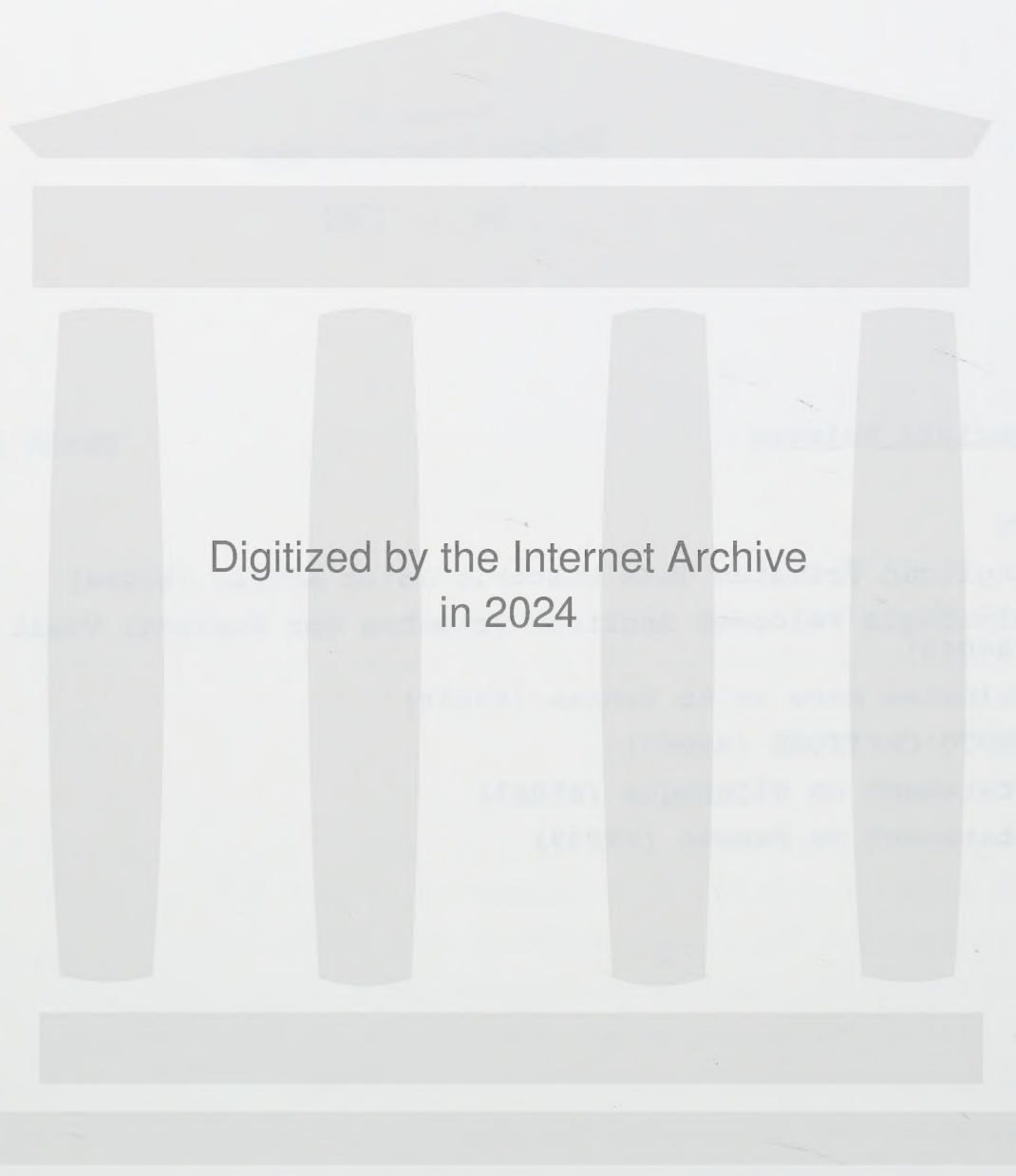
APR 11 1989

For Immediate Release

March 28, 1989

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GOD'S PEOPLE HAVE SUFFERED ENOUGH

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"GOD'S PEOPLE HAVE SUFFERED ENOUGH"

I Anglican Primates Take Historic Joint Action DPS 89064

NEW YORK (DPS, Mar. 28) -- The formal description of the visit of four Anglican primates to the troubled Central American nations of Nicaragua and Panama was a "Mission for Witness and Reconciliation in Nicaragua and Panama." (See DPS 89044.)

The Anglican leaders who made the visit (March 14-21), Presiding Bishop Edmond L. Browning of the Episcopal Church in the United States, Archbishop Desmond Tutu of Southern Africa, Archbishop Michael Peers of the Anglican Church in Canada, and Archbishop Orland Lindsay of the Anglican Church of the Province of the West Indies, did take up the mandate they had set themselves vigorously and wholeheartedly. There are indications that the visit was a fruitful one, both for the visitors and for the host nations, on a number of levels. Furthermore, the visit was an historic event in another way. It represented a step forward in the evolution of the Anglican Communion.

On the eve of last summer's Lambeth Conference, there was much speculation in the religious and secular press about the viability into the next century of the loose alliance of national Churches built on the Anglican tradition and led, traditionally and symbolically, by England's primate, the Archbishop of Canterbury. Could it survive its own diversity? Could such a loose structure -- meeting as a body only once every decade -- withstand the pressures created by growth, evolution, and change in its members. Could the essentially "English" Communion of the nineteenth century really become the multinational, multiracial, multilingual body the realities of the world demanded it become and still function in the corporate way its architects prayed and dreamed about? Could it cope with the evolving idea of "degrees of communion" within the body raised by the issue of the ordination of women in some member communions?

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To the amazement of many who arrived at the Lambeth Conference of 1988 skeptical, the consensus about positive answers to the above questions coming out of the days of living and worshipping and talking together was a resounding "Yes" -- and with fewer qualifications than the Anglican spirit has led one to expect.

The "Yes" of the Anglican Communion, the affirmation of its own continuing existence and evolution, was expressed in the reactions of those who participated. It was also expressed, and is being expressed, in more concrete terms. The work of the Eames Commission on the issues raised by the ordination of women to the episcopate and the ways in which the member Churches can live together, with some accepting this development and others not, is one concrete and hopeful sign that "the system can work." The visit of the four primates to a troubled area of our shared world in March 1989 is an equally concrete and hopeful sign for the future.

The four Anglican leaders who went together to Central America were saying, "We are in communion; we are united by the bonds of caring." They were also saying that the Anglican Communion is alive and well and headed toward the next century.

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II Nicaragua Welcomes Anglican Primates for Pastoral Visit DPS 89065

by James M. Rosenthal, II, editor, Anglican Advance, Chicago
MANAGUA (DPS, Mar. 28) -- In a spirit of solidarity and concern, the Most Rev. Edmond L. Browning, Presiding Bishop and Primate of the Episcopal Church, led a delegation of primates, bishops, clergy, and laity to the strife-torn country of Nicaragua (March 14-19). The visit, the result of an invitation by the Rt. Rev. Sturdie W. Downs, Anglican Bishop of Nicaragua, was one of advocacy and encouragement for the people of the Nicaraguan Church as it ministers to its people. "We have come with a hope that our visit will enable us to be advocates for justice which will bear fruit in a lasting peace," the bishops declared in their joint statement issued on the eve of Passion Sunday in the capital city of Managua.

Joining the Presiding Bishop on the visit were the Most Rev. Desmond M. Tutu, Archbishop of Capetown, Province of Southern Africa; the Most Rev. Michael Peers, Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada; the Most Rev. Orland Lindsay, Archbishop of the West Indies; and the Rt. Rev. James Ottley, Bishop of Panama and President of Province IX of the Episcopal Church (which includes dioceses in Central America, Mexico, and in countries in the northern portion of South America). Patti Browning, Leah Tutu, Olga Lindsay, and Dorothy Peers joined their husbands on this historic visit.

The Bishop of Costa Rica, the Rt. Rev. Cornelius Wilson, and the Rt. Rev. Frank T. Griswold, Bishop of Chicago, also took part in the program with the primates. The Diocese of Chicago had formed its own delegation of clergy and laity who journeyed to the Diocese of Nicaragua to officially open its companion diocese relationship with the Nicaraguan Church.

The whirlwind exposure to the life and history of Nicaragua brought the bishops and their party face to face with the sights, sounds, and temperaments of this small Central American country during

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a period of struggles and victories. It reminded them of the birth of a nation.

Tensions as well as expectations run high in Nicaragua. A Church that once served English and North American traders, landowners, and wealthy business concerns, now has before it ministry to people that challenge the Church with their experience, culture, and way of life. The Rt. Rev. Sturdie Downs, a native of Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast region, serves as a symbol of the Church's emerging presence in the country. Downs sees the Episcopal Church as "a viable alternative to the Roman Catholic and Evangelical churches." Downs feels people have responded well to the openness and inclusivity of the Anglican Church as it continues to shape its role in the larger religious community.

The vigorous itinerary set by the host committee of the Diocese of Nicaragua, led by Isolina Downs, the Rev. Ennis Duffis, the Rev. Hedley Wilson, the Rev. Allan Taylor, and Jorge Porter, included an intentional and unrestricted encounter with pro-government, anti-government, and neutral organizations as they relate to the country's postrevolutionary Sandinista government. The primates met with human rights organizations, the three major daily newspapers, and ecumenical church leaders, all of whom gave testimony to their life and work in the country since the revolution. Every imaginable twentieth-century political, sociological, psychological, religious, and economic confrontation has become part of the framework of Nicaragua.

A lingering sense of contradiction faces the people as they continue their struggle to free their country from the terrorism of dictatorship, while finding their way, often stumbling, with a burden too large for a young country to manage alone. Nicaraguans face the reality of over a dozen political parties that seek to influence people in their thinking.

The constant threat of counterrevolutionary attacks forces an already weak and depleted economy to provide funds for arms and protection while people are homeless and hungry on the streets of its

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cities and villages. The bishops' statement called on the United States government to cease financial assistance to Contra forces stationed in Honduras, and expressed "deep distress and anger when we have seen the intense suffering inflicted by the Contra war, a war financed and sponsored by people sitting in the safety of foreign capitals." Their call affirmed the stand already taken by the 1988 General Convention of the Episcopal Church.

In and out of crowded jeeps and vans, the primates' delegation was a sight to behold. Even in the heat of the day, the bishops donned cassocks of bright magenta, some complete with zucchetos (skull caps). The people warmly welcomed the bishops. Downs expressed his thanks to the delegation for their visit and assured them of the importance of their presence for the Episcopal Church. Press coverage reached a new high for the diocese, as reporters and camera operators followed the Anglican troupe.

Worship and prayer were central to the visit of the chief pastors; a solemn eucharist was celebrated in Managua on the first night of the visit. A similar liturgy was offered later in the tour, in the ruined Church of San Marcos (St. Mark's Episcopal Church) in Bluefields, in the country's Atlantic Coast region. Downs was born in this part of the country, an area that is also the birthplace of Anglicanism in Nicaragua. The Atlantic Coast was also the region hardest hit by Hurricane Joan in October 1988.

In Managua, the service was held at St. Francis Church, where the congregation includes members of the United States Embassy staff as well as an emerging Hispanic congregation. Archbishop Tutu preached the homily, which challenged the gathering to hear the words of the prophet Isaiah, who speaks of the Lord as the one to be a light to the nations, to open eyes that are blind, and to bring out the prisoners from the dungeons. Tutu used the propers of a votive mass for social justice, where the words of the Epistle of James -- "Listen my beloved, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those

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who love him?" -- spoke to members of the delegation as well as to the hundreds of people packing the church.

Events in Managua included a one-and-a-half-hour live television talk show on the government channel that focused on Anglicanism and the role of the Church in strife-torn areas of the world. The bishops met with leaders of CEPAD, the Evangelical Committee for Aid in Development, which provides a united witness and focus for the Church in Nicaragua. The Episcopal Church is a founding member of CEPAD.

On March 16, the primates were invited to participate in a unique live television program in Managua called "Cara al pueblo" (Face the People) in which the President of Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega, and members of his cabinet customarily answer questions posed by ordinary Nicaraguans about problems in the country. The primates and their delegation sat with the Nicaraguan government group during the program. Browning and Tutu expressed their hopes and concerns for the people of Nicaragua during the telecast.

The delegation was also received by John Leonard, charge d'affaires at the United States embassy. The fortress-like embassy building symbolizes the tensions that prevail between the United States and Nicaragua. The attitude expressed by staff members at the embassy seemed to indicate a wish to have relations improve under the Bush administration. The bishops concurred with these hopes.

Perhaps the most moving episodes in the visit of the primates took place on March 17 when they went to Bluefields. Hurricane Joan hit Bluefields with a vengeance, destroying already poorly constructed buildings, leaving behind a trail of destruction. Yet, as the bishops left the military plane provided by the government (one cleric nicknamed it "Airforce One"), they could hear the sounds of hammers and saws in every corner of the city.

In the ruins of St. Mark's Episcopal Church, the bell tower survives, and the sound of its bell greeted the bishops at their first

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stop in Bluefields. Witnesses said that the same bell rang a solemn death knell on the night of the hurricane, a different sound from the joyful peal as the bishops greeted the faithful. The Primate of Canada celebrated a Solemn Eucharist in the ruins of St. Mark's, with the Archbishop of the West Indies as preacher. As chief pastor, Browning brought special greetings to the hundreds of worshippers, declaring the celebration as one that surpassed many of the ceremonies he had experienced in the great cathedrals of the world. Browning's presence and posture during the entire Central American visit was one of pastor, friend, and advocate for the people of God who live there.

A highlight of the visit to the Atlantic Coast region was the meeting with the mayor, the representative to the National Assembly from the Atlantic Coast region, and an official who traced an impressive plan for the recovery of the area, as well as outlining its unique history. At the eucharist, the Prayers of the People invited the congregation to pray that the world might be freed from "poverty, famine, and disaster," realities to many in that community.

Nicaragua continues to face the dilemma of balancing people of several nationalities and races, while existing in an atmosphere of tension between those who speak Spanish and those who speak English.

"God's people have suffered enough," was an acclamation that summarized the bishops' concern for the people of Nicaragua. "One cannot visit the country without being overwhelmed by the toll of life and property caused by a chain of events -- the oppression of the Somoza regime, the earthquake, the hurricane, and agonizing civil war and the present forest fires," the statement read. Dorothy Peers observed that the people of Bluefields have "put up with a lot," but she found them smiling and openhearted, and she feels this is a "sign of hope -- they have not lost their sense of preparing for the future."

It was no accident that the pastoral visit of the primates came as Holy Week approached. "The Nicaraguan people have described

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their life and spiritual journey as a constant passion. They live each day as a Via Crucis (Way of the Cross). Our presence is a show of solidarity and a demonstration of faith in a loving and reconciling God," the bishops stated.

Ortega met with the party at the airport before their departure for Panama on Palm Sunday. Headlines in the official Sandinista daily La Barricada had reported that Browning would do all in his power to seek peace in Nicaragua through an appeal to George Bush, the President of the United States, who is an Episcopalian. In his remarks on Nicaragua, Browning stressed his belief that Bush, as a committed Christian and an active Episcopalian, would work for justice and peace in Nicaragua.

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III Primates Move on to Panama

DPS 89066

by George B. Lewis, Jr., freelance editor and writer

NEW YORK (DPS, Mar. 28) -- On March 19, Palm Sunday, Browning and the primatial delegation -- including Tutu, Peers, and Lindsay -- arrived in Panama at the invitation the country's Episcopal bishop, the Rt. Rev. James P. Ottley, who had been among those traveling with the primates' delegation in Nicaragua. The primates' wives accompanied them to Panama.

The delegation, fresh from its trip to Nicaragua, came to Panama, according to a joint statement, "to rejoice in the courage and liveliness of the people in the face of great difficulties and to be a witness to do all that we can to assist in the struggle of all people for justice, with a hope that their differences can be reconciled."

Unlike Nicaragua, Panama is a relatively prosperous country with a substantial middle class. Its capital, Panama City, is a bustling metropolis. It is an important banking center that, along with the canal, makes Panama an international crossroads.

Panama's political experience is also uniquely its own. In 1988, Panama's President Eric Delvalle was ousted under pressure brought by military strongman, General Manuel Noriega, and the national assembly replaced Delvalle in the presidency with Manuel Solis Palma. Nevertheless, Noriega remained the country's de facto leader. At the same time, the United States government called for the ouster of Noriega, and denied recognition to Solis Palma.

There was no attempt on the part of the primates to avoid Panama's political and economic problems. On the first day of the visit, Browning led a question-and-answer session at the Diocesan Center in Panama City -- a session that was open to the public. It was readily apparent from the give-and-take at this session how complicated and painful the political and economic issues that divide them are for Panamanians.

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Despite the issue of government recognition, the delegation wanted to meet Solis Palma. Initially, they were told he would meet with them. Then they were told he would not do so. Further inquiries were not answered. Finally, they received word that Noriega would like to meet with them. This caused discussion among the members of the delegation, who did not want to give the impression that they endorsed the General's regime. The debate continued until Bishop Ottley interceded, explaining that the primates were actually in a unique position to ask Noriega direct and important questions that few others would be able to ask.

The next morning the four primates met with Noriega and his 11 top aides. The General began with an introduction that was a short history of his country in light of United States involvement there.

The delegation asked Noriega about some of the charges leveled at his regime: the closing down of newspapers and of radio and television stations; the holding of political prisoners. They asked about the promised national elections in May and pressed the question of allowing international observers during the process. Another concern of the delegates were the difficulties of the canal workers who had been denied their "paz y salvo" (tax clearance papers), a crucial document in Panama.

Noriega denied the existence of press censorship and political prisoners in his country. He added that Panama's political parties would monitor the elections themselves. He promised that he would look into easing the restrictions on "paz y salvo."

When asked who was actually running Panama, the civil government or the military, Noriega declared it was a joint effort.

That night at the Civic Center in Panama City, before a crowd of some 3,000 people, Tutu delivered a heart-felt sermon on tyranny. His Spanish-language translator was the Rev. Diana Suarez, an ordained woman priest of the Diocese of Panama.

Tutu confined his remarks to the conditions in his native South Africa, but it was clear that there were many parts of his

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sermon with which the audience identified closely. In his country, he told the audience, they have closed down newspapers; they do not allow freedom of the press. He asked the audience if they could believe that. They responded with thunderous applause. He told the audience of how, in his country, people could be put in jail without a trial; and that a large percentage of the people of his country had no say in their own government. "I am talking about tyrants," he said. The audience response was enthusiastic.

A skilled public speaker, Tutu, throughout his sermon, assured the audience that he was talking only about South Africa. However, the audience made it obvious that they knew he was talking about far more than a country thousands of miles away.

The delegation met with various groups in Panama, including clergy and lay leaders of the Episcopal Diocese and officials of the Panama Canal Commission. In their visit to the Canal Zone, the delegation learned something of the pressures placed on canal employees because of the United States government sanctions imposed on Panama, and also because the Panamanian workers on the canal do not have the same benefits and entitlements as workers with United States citizenship. On the one hand, delegates were assured that because of the "Canal spirit," work on the vital waterway is going smoothly. On the other hand, it was made clear to delegates that it would not take much to destroy the "peaceful balance" that is now maintained in the Canal Zone.

Delegates also met with representatives of the ecumenical community in Panama, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, including the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Panama, Marcos McGrath, representatives of Accion Civilista, and a civil rights group.

The joint statement the primates made at the end of their visit addressed a variety of concerns.

In line with the resolution passed by the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church in the United States in May 1988, the four

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primates asked that the sanctions imposed by the United States upon Panama be lifted. "These sanctions have led to the destruction of the country's economy, caused immense suffering on the poorest of the poor, increased unemployment, and aggravated social problems. It is also apparent to us that the government of Panama uses the effects of these sanctions to rally nationalist support against the United States."

The delegation also called for "the release of all prisoners held without trial and for an end to the persecution of opposition party members."

The primates urged "the government of Panama to lift all restrictions on the media" and requested "the Electoral Court to allow observers from different international organizations to guarantee just elections."

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PHOTO CAPTIONS

(89067/1) Rt. Rev. Sturdie W. Downs (center) welcomes the delegation of primates to St. Francis Church, Managua, where a Solemn Eucharist for Justice and Peace will be celebrated. Behind Downs, left to right, are Archbishop Orland Lindsay, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Presiding Bishop Edmond L. Browning, and Archbishop Michael Peers.

(89067/2) The Presiding Bishop joins the flight crew on the Nicaraguan plane that transported the primates' delegation from Managua to Bluefields on March 17.

(89067/3) Browning is met by young admirers when the delegation lands at Bluefields, the scene of Hurricane Joan's worst devastation. Bluefields was the birthplace of Anglicanism in Nicaragua.

(89067/4) Bishops Downs (foreground) and Archbishop Tutu meet the hospitable people of Bluefields.

(89067/5) Patti Browning (center) is surrounded with newfound friends when she arrives in Bluefields, Nicaragua.

(89067/6) Bishop Downs (center) follows Presiding Bishop in procession at the Solemn Eucharist celebrated in the ruins of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Bluefields.

(89067/7) Bishops' wives join the congregation at St. Mark's Church in Bluefields. Left to right, Dorothy Peers of Canada, Isolina Downs of Nicaragua, Patti Browning of the United States, and Leah Tutu of South Africa.

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(89067/8) Anglican delegates visit the offices of La Barricada, the official Sandinista newspaper, in Managua, Nicaragua. From left to right, Archbishop Lindsay, Bishop Ottley (of Panama), Archbishop Tutu, and Carlos Fernando Chamorro, one of the newspaper's editors. The delegation was especially anxious to explore the issue of freedom of the press and of the national press as a mirror of the people's lives.

(89067/9) In Panama the delegation, like all other visitors to the country, wanted to see the famous canal. Here (left to right) Archbishop Lindsay, the Presiding Bishop, Archbishop Peers, Archbishop Tutu, and Leah Tutu have a look at the controls that operate the locks. The canal remains central to the economy of Panama as do the problems of the workers who operate and maintain the waterway.

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STATEMENT OF THE ANGLICAN BISHOPS AND ARCHBISHOPS ON NICARAGUA
MARCH 18, 1989

MISSION STATEMENT

DPS 89068

We are a delegation of Anglican Primates and the President of the IXth Province of the Episcopal Church in the United States. We have come to Nicaragua at the invitation of our brother, the Bishop of Nicaragua, Sturdie W. Downs, to share in a ministry and witness to the people of God in this country of much suffering. We have come with the hope that our visit will enable us to become advocates for justice which will bear fruit in a lasting peace and that we may be an encouragement to the Nicaraguan Church as it ministers to a long-suffering people.

This historic gathering of seven bishops is reflective of the full concern of the entire Anglican Communion for peace and reconciliation in this country.

We have visited the Atlantic Coast community of Bluefields, the birthplace of the Anglican Church in Nicaragua, as well as the city of Managua. Our mission will conclude in Panama.

Our mission had prayer and worship as its central focus. The celebration of the Holy Eucharist at the ruins of historic St. Mark's Church in Bluefields was a lively testimony to the resilience of a suffering people.

To aid in our understanding, we have met with people representative of the entire political spectrum including the Independent Human Rights Group; the government's human rights group; representatives of the ecumenical community -- CEPAD and CEBIC; the editors of three major dailies. We also met with civic and diplomatic officials including the President, the Vice President, the Mayor of Bluefields, a representative to the National Assembly from the Atlantic Coast region, and the Charge d'Affaires at the United States Embassy. Our visit was strengthened by many face-to-face contracts with the Nicaraguan people both within and without the Anglican community.

As a delegation of Christian leaders, we regret that Cardinal Obando y Bravo was unable to see us.

We take note of several events that have a significant impact on Nicaragua, in and around the time of our visit:

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the request to the Congress of the United States for the further provision of financial assistance to Contra forces based in Honduras;
the release of ex-national guardsmen of the Somoza regime as called for in Esquipulas II;
the warming of relations with the Roman Catholic hierarchy permitting the return of ten foreign priests who had previously been denied reentry.

It is significant to note that we come at the beginning of Passiontide, the most sacred period of our church calendar. This was not an accident. The Nicaraguan people have described their life and spiritual journey as a constant passion -- they live each day as a via crucis. Our presence is a show of solidarity and a demonstration of a faith in a loving and reconciling God.

SOME IMPRESSIONS THAT WE CARRY FROM OUR VISIT

GOD'S PEOPLE HAVE SUFFERED ENOUGH!

One cannot visit the country without being overwhelmed by the toll on life and property caused by a chain of events -- the oppression of the Somoza regime, earthquake, hurricane, an agonizing civil war, and forest fires -- to name the most devastating.

We are especially moved by the enormity of the destruction on the Atlantic Coast -- in Bluefields.

The suffering of mothers who have lost their children, children who have lost their parents, families divided through civil strife is all too apparent.

Nicaragua suffers from the international debt crisis affecting many Latin American and other developing nations. This economic crisis has been exacerbated by the direction of resources to the Civil War and the recent devastation of environment caused by Hurricane Joan.

We have, during our visit, felt deep distress and anger when we have seen the intense suffering inflicted on the people of Nicaragua by the "contra" war -- a war financed and sponsored by people sitting in the safety of foreign capitals. Our Nicaraguan experience has given us a new sympathy for the view of great numbers of people in the developing world that United States administrations, in this case, the Reagan administration, have been prepared to subject entire peoples to the ravages of war to pursue their economic interests and because of objections to the ideological complexion of their governments. We have heard the United States government justify its refusal to impose further sanctions against apartheid in South Africa on the grounds that they would cause suffering. We find this argument to be in total

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conflict with the United States government's willingness to impose sanctions on Nicaragua and Panama and to inflict the evil of war on the people of Nicaragua.

It is our hope that the new Bush administration and policies emerging therefrom will open a window of opportunity for change.

A CALL FOR ACTION

The five Central American presidents, representing governments of a wide range of political persuasions, took a step of great importance when, following up their earlier initiatives, they signed the agreement of February 14 in El Salvador.

We admire the willingness of President Ortega, for whatever reason, to allow specific focus on the problems of his country in that agreement. The actions of the Nicaraguan government since the agreement, in particular the release of political prisoners, appear to us to demonstrate a commitment to allowing freer political activity and to bringing about peace based on reconciliation. We appeal to the Nicaraguan government to follow up this week's amnesty by releasing all prisoners falling within the classification made by the Inter-American Human Rights Commission.

We have no doubt the vast majority of Nicaraguans want an end to foreign sponsorship of conflict in their country, and we support unequivocally the request of the Central American presidents that governments within and outside the region should immediately cease aid to irregular or insurrectional forces. In response to the recent proposals of the United States administration for new aid to contra forces in Honduras, we can accept such aid only if it contributes directly to the implementation of the El Salvador agreement. There must be enforceable guarantees that aid is used for repatriating members of the contra forces or relocating them in third countries. We reject any suggestion that humanitarian assistance should be used to keep them in Honduras as a threat hanging over the head of the Sandinista government.

We affirm the right of the region to determine its own future. We urge the governments of North America and Europe to support the implementation by Central American nations of the Esquipulus II peace process.

We are aware of the invitation to the government of Canada from the Central American nations to participate in the international, unarmed verification team called for by the Esquipulus II peace accord, and we urge the government to respond positively.

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We are encouraged by the decision of Nicaragua's National Reconciliation Commission to send a delegation to contra camps in Honduras to investigate the whereabouts of children allegedly kidnapped by the counterrevolutionary forces, and we call on the contras to return the children. We urge the Honduran government to facilitate the process.

We have heard reports from human rights agencies in Nicaragua that have documented abuses and violations committed by both the Sandinista government and the counterrevolutionary forces. We denounce all such violations and urge both the government and contra forces to respect the basic human rights of the people of Nicaragua.

Our witness to Nicaragua's physical devastation causes us to urge our governments to respond to the overwhelming need for development assistance, especially in the Atlantic Coast area where reconstruction assistance is needed to aid in the recovery from the effects of Hurricane Joan.

We support the prophetic witness of the Episcopal Church in Nicaragua and that of the ecumenical community in their efforts to be peacemakers and reconcilers, and we will urge our churches to be fully supportive of the Episcopal Church and its mission and ministry.

Most Rev. Edmond L. Browning, Presiding Bishop and Primate, Episcopal Church in the United States of America

Most Rev. Orland U. Lindsay, Archbishop and Primate, Church of the Province of the West Indies

Most Rev. Michael Peers, Archbishop and Primate, Anglican Church of Canada

Most Rev. Desmond M. Tutu, Archbishop of Capetown and Metropolitan of the Church of the Province of Southern Africa

Rt. Rev. James H. Ottley, Bishop of Panama and President of the IXth Province of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America

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STATEMENT OF ANGLICAN PRIMATES ON PANAMA
MARCH 20, 1989

DPS 89069

We are delegation of Anglican Primates who are making a pastoral visit in the Diocese of Panama at the invitation of the Episcopal Bishop, James H. Ottley. Bishop Ottley invited us to the Diocese at the conclusion of our pastoral visit in the Diocese of Nicaragua.

We have come to rejoice in the courage and liveliness of the people in the face of great difficulties and to be a witness to do all that we can to assist in the struggle of all people for justice, with a hope that their differences can be reconciled.

During our brief stay in Panama, we were able to meet with a range of the Episcopal Diocese of Panama; General Manuel Noriega; officials of the Canal Commission; representatives of the ecumenical community, both Protestant and Roman Catholic; the Apostolic Nuncio and Msgr. Marcos McGrath, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Panama; representatives of Accion Civilista and a human rights group.

In our meeting with General Noriega, we raised the issues of press freedom, political detainees, the May elections (particularly the question of independent observers), and the difficulties canal workers have had in obtaining "paz y salvo."

From our two-day visit, we would like to address these specific concerns: human rights, the May 7 election, sanctions and canal-related issues and the Role of the Church.

SANCTIONS

We have been informed by various groups and organizations of the disastrous effects of the U.S. sanctions against Panama. These sanctions have led to the destruction of the country's economy, caused immense suffering on the poorest of the poor, increased unemployment, and aggravated social problems. It is also apparent to us that the government of Panama uses the effect of these sanctions to rally nationalist support against the United States. This paralyzes many people who, like the majority of Panamanians, are opposed to sanctions, but who are restricted from speaking out on this issue for fear of being labeled in favor of General Noriega. We can therefore say that these sanctions inflict a double oppression on the citizens of Panama.

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We believe that these sanctions, opposed by the general population, and inflicted by the United States in an attempt to force the ouster of General Noriega, must cease. The U.S. policy has failed, and their continued imposition helps the government to direct attention from the real, serious internal economic and political crisis. We call upon the U.S. government, therefore, to immediately end the sanctions placed on Panama, so that the unjust suffering can be alleviated and so that the overwhelming domestic problems can be brought to light and addressed by the people of Panama, as a sovereign independent nation, without external oppression and interference.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE GENERAL ELECTION

During our visit, we heard allegations of serious human rights abuses perpetrated by the government. We were told that political prisoners were being held in jail without trial, specifically that soldiers accused of trying to overthrow General Noriega had been jailed for more than a year. We also heard of activists being forced to leave the country and go into exile.

We call for the release of prisoners held without trial and for an end to persecution of opposition party members.

We have also heard that newspapers, radio stations, and a television station had been closed and that those still operating were subject to censorship. General Noriega's explanation of the closure was that psychological war was being conducted against the government. Despite this explanation, we believe the media should be allowed to operate freely.

We commend the holding of the general elections set for May 7, 1989. They are a sign of hope for the society, and the fact that all Panamanians have been promised the right to vote is one of the reasons we can oppose the implementation of sanctions on Panama while supporting them against apartheid in South Africa.

However, their legitimacy will be open to question both in Panama and in the international community if they are conducted with the media restricted and in the absence of credible international observers. We therefore urge the government of Panama to lift all restrictions on the media with immediate effect. We further request the Electoral Court to allow observers from different international organizations to guarantee just elections. Arising from discussions at our meeting with General Noriega, we as Primates of the Anglican Communion intend asking the world church community to appoint a delegation of election observers to travel to Panama and observe the elections on our behalf.

We finally issue an appeal for the results of just elections to be respected as the will of the people of Panama.

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One cannot visit Panama without reflecting on the canal and its history as it has been a source of great opportunity and great dismay. As a matter of fact, the Anglican-Episcopal Church came to Panama to minister to many of the workers who had come from the Caribbean Islands at the time of its construction.

The current joint management of the Panama Canal while presenting greater opportunity for many Panamanians also produces certain dichotomies for the work force. Panamanian employees of the commission do not enjoy all the benefits that employees of United States citizenship enjoy. We urge the Congress of the United States to review employee benefit packages for all Canal Commission employees in order that citizens of the United States and citizens of Panama working for the Commission may obtain the same employee benefits. We urge General Noriega to follow through on his promise to review the policy of denying a "pas y salvo" to Panamanian employees of the Canal Commission by lifting the restrictions on obtaining that document in order that Panamanians working in the Canal Zone enjoy equal privilege with all other Panamanian citizens.

THE CHURCH

We have visited with the churches and heard their concerns and hope and agreed that, if the Church is to help bring about reconciliation and peace between brothers and sisters in Panama, between opposition and government differences, it is necessary to work without taking partisan positions in the political arena. Trust needs to be planted, so that reconciliation can be attained.

Therefore, as Primes of the Anglican Communion visiting Panama March 19-21, 1989, we commend and encourage the work being done by the Christian Churches together in their effort to attain this reconciliation and peace among the Panamanian family, and we will urge our churches to be fully supportive of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Panama in its mission and ministry.

Most Rev. Edmond L. Browning, Presiding Bishop and Primate, Episcopal Church in the United States of America

Most Rev. Orland U. Lindsay, Archbishop and Primate, Church of the Province of the West Indies

Most Rev. Michael Peers, Archbishop and Primate, Anglican Church of Canada

Most Rev. Desmond M. Tutu, Archbishop of Capetown and Metropolitan of the Church of the Province of Southern Africa

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